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CIA's New Director and Self-Esteem at Langley

PRESIDENT-ELECT REAGAN is in the process of selecting the next director of the CIA and instructing him on his mission there. Is the mission of the next director impossible? Can the CIA be revitalized—revitalized to execute its function as a primary arm of national security?

Fortunately, the President-elect has both a unique opportunity and unique assistance in making his selection, and in empowering the next CIA Director to re-invigorate what could and should be the finest intelligence service in the world. Vice President-elect Bush will be the only Vice President the nation has ever had who has also headed the CIA. He is considered by the vast majority of those who worked with him at Langley as the "Director who restored the dignity of CIA." Unfortunately, his tenure was short-lived.

Whether it was the background, the training, or the marching orders which former naval officer Stansfield Turner received from President Carter—or more likely, a combination of all three—the result has been disastrous for the nation's safety. There are numerous examples of inadequate or mismanaged intelligence in the past two years, e.g. Soviet wheat estimates, North Korean order of battle, the phantom Soviet brigade in Cuba, and Soviet intentions in Afghanistan. (The Cuban brigade is an issue which years ago represented a gap or failure in intelligence collection or analysis, but which last year became an intelligence success—and a political disaster in the use of intelligence.) But one intelligence failure alone, of the magnitude involved in CIA's incorrect prediction of the survivability of the Shah of Iran, is sufficient to make the point. That intelligence disaster can be rationalized as possessing numerous parts, not all of CIA Director Turner's making. Yet the consequences of it can only be summed up as the betrayal of a great public trust. Both the nation and the President were ill-served by it. The confluence of events following this intelligence failure made a singular contribution to hurling President Carter out of office. History tells us that this is not the first time an intelligence misestimation has brought down a government.

Certainly no intelligence failure of that proportion can pass without cruelly impacting on the self-esteem of those officers at CIA who view their assigned trust as that of preventing such an event, if, as appears the case, that self-esteem had not already been nearly extinguished. If there is any disagreement among Republicans and Democrats on the crippling demoralization at CIA, it is not in the fact nor in the extent of it, but possibly the time—three years, or five or more—and the measures requisite to curing it.

In a televised address to the nation on the 19th of October, President-elect Reagan said: "We must restore the ability of the CIA and other intelligence agencies to keep us informed and forewarned about terrorist activities, and we must take the lead in forging an international consensus that firmness and refusal to concede or to pay ransom are ultimately the only effective deterrents to terrorism."

Congress (now, and as it is to be), both political parties, and the American people are bent on the need to reforge CIA into an instrument that will not let the people of the next President wake up one morning to surprises involving our national

survival. As George Bush knows so well, having all too briefly administered a cure to the disheartened but qualified and dedicated officers at Langley, the next cure demands in its mixture a high content of attention to the self-respect of these dispirited employees, carefully balanced with the needs of the intelligence service. For after all, it is the employees who, with imagination and inspiration, make up the alchemy that allows the impenetrable to be penetrated and turns stone into significant intelligence.

Able management can and does bring the best out of analysis of intelligence collection; but first, the hearts and the will of those doing these precise and demanding jobs must be revitalized. The flame is out at CIA. Some say that may be a bit strong; other say there is not even a glow in the ashes, so totally has the excessive bureaucratization, the ill-conceived firings, and the flood of resignations destroyed the will and ability of those who remain to dissent from ill-fated operations and chart new ones, with measured risk and high gain. Yet all strongly agree, or most all, that the flame would flash back in an instant if the new director would say the magic words.

"Trust! Trust and initiative! I want you people to take new initiatives. I will back those initiatives. You now have and will continue to have my trust!"

If this were repeated and drummed down the line and above all, demonstrated that it was meant, then we are told the flame will burn again at Langley. Unfortunately, fear at CIA has never been higher. Fear of failure. Fear of disapproval. Fear of losing out in the bureaucratic protection game. More energy is being expended on defending decisions and the system than in finding innovative ways to better it. And better it the nation must.

We urge President-elect Reagan to review "the cure" with his Vice President. The most telling statement a new director could make to his employees—people who have been repeatedly described as the most able collection of human beings of any organization in the country—would be to tell them that the President has instructed him to take initiatives and generate new ways for CIA to fulfill its mission:

"He has instructed me to experiment [now a dangerous word at CIA] with new solutions to our problems. He expects us to succeed. He knows not all initiatives will be rewarding. Yet you and I will take these initiatives. I will back you. In turn, the President will back our efforts. Innovation, not fear of failure, will motivate our work. There will be failures, to be sure, but there must be new successes if we are to keep the trust bestowed upon us." And, we would add, intelligence gaps like those on Iran cannot be tolerated.

The President-elect can give the people at Langley back their self-respect by giving them a director with such instructions. To our knowledge, no other director has been so encouraged or so empowered by a president. By so doing, the President-elect will be giving the people at CIA a course for the future that they, in turn, can esteem. He also will be giving the nation back an intelligence service that can and will assist him in meeting our national survival needs.

Benjamin F. Schemmer